accounts are maintained by overseas suppliers etc. with banks in India. The question of excluding small scale industry and women entrepreneurs, therefore, does not arise.

Latest Balance of Payments Position

2239. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the latest position of Government on Balance of Payments;

(b) whether due to economic recession and gloomy scenario, the crisis of Balance of Payments may face serious challenge;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the steps Government propose to take to face any crisis being created by Balance of Payments situation?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI YASHWANT SINHA): (a) to (d) The latest available data on India's balance of payments (BOP) relate to the period upto the quarter ended September, 1998. According to these data, the current account deficit during the first half of 1998-99 amounted to US $ 3085 million. Latest available information for 1998-99 indicates that despite a modest widening of the trade deficit, the net surplus under invisibles continues to remain buoyant while in the capital account net inflows of US $ 4.2 billion under the Resurgent India Bonds have supplemented normal sources of external finance. As a result, the foreign currency assests of the RBI have increased by US $ 1.8 billion during the first eleven months of the current financial year to reach a level of US $ 27.8 billion at the end of February, 1999.

As per the current indications, the BOP situation during the coming year is expected to remain manageable. However, the developments in the BOP are being closely and continuously monitored with a view to undertaking suitable policy measures, if warranted.

Criteria for setting up of Bank Branches in Rural areas

2240. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to strengthen the banking operations in rural parts of the country;

(b) if so, the number of branches of Nationalised Banks operating in rural parts of the country, State-wise;

(c) the number of new branches of banks likely to be set up in rural parts of the country, State-wise, during the year 1999 and 2000; and

(d) the criteria for setting up bank branches in rural parts of the country and the estimated number of persons likely to be benefitted?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M.R. JANARTHANAN): (a) to (d) State-wise number of branches of nationalised banks operating in the rural areas, as reported by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is given in the Statement *(See* below).

Under the extant Branch Licensing Policy of Reserve Bank of India (RBI), it is left to the judgement of the individual banks to assess the need for opening additional bank branches in rural areas including the underdeveloped hilly areas of the country and no state-wise/area-wise targets have been fixed. The proposals received from the banks for opening of additonal rural branches at centres which fall in the service area of the applicant bank and which are recommended by the concerned State Government are considered by RBI on merits. The State-wise number of authorisation/licences issued to public sector banks for opening branches in rural areas is indicated in the enclosed Statement below.